

Whether or not one embraces the claim that Hume should be read as consciously advocating strong moral atheism, Holden provides a detailed argument that Hume's account of morality is inconsistent with any view of God as possessing moral attributes. In seeking to integrate Hume's theories concerning moral psychology with his well-known critiques of natural theology, this monograph provides an important exercise in reading Hume holistically. One need not think that Hume is invariably consistent in his views, or even to agree with the central tenets of Hume's philosophy, to see the value in this approach.

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Christopher Ryan *Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Religion: The Death of God and the Oriental Renaissance*. (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2010).

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Christopher Ryan does not overdramatize his subject with this provocative subtitle. Rather, he recounts two moments in the development of European religious consciousness in the nineteenth century as Arthur Schopenhauer interprets a historical revolution in matters of religious faith taking shape during his time and virtually before his eyes. Schopenhauer is not only witness to what he thinks of as an inevitable progression toward atheism and away from naïve religious totemism and the personification of natural forces and human ideals in monotheistic traditions, especially Christianity, but he contributes philosophically to the process of assassinating God, and he holds out the prospect of a deeper religious rebirth of understanding inspired by the great Asian mythologies of Hinduism (Brahmanism) and Buddhism, coinciding not coincidentally with the principles of Schopenhauer's own transcendental idealism.

Ryan writes an excellent, philosophically informed, and scholarly account of Schopenhauer's philosophy of religion. Schopenhauer has much to say about religion, and about the concepts of and philosophical reasoning concerning the existence and nature of God, and the philosophical meaning of many elements of traditional religious practices, which he ventures to explain from the standpoint of his speculative metaphysics of the world as will and representation. Ryan has a thorough grasp of Schopenhauer's philosophy and a solid background in comparative religions. He moves comfortably between these two fields with a sufficient command of the necessary original languages to weave together an exposition of major topics surrounding Schopenhauer's complex critique of

religion. Ryan details Schopenhauer's sense of a European cultural reawakening to true religious meaning in the form of a more philosophically respectable metaphysical appropriation of 'Oriental' religious ideas, dimly glimpsed and codified in fables, symbols, and parable for popular consumption in their original form, but better explicable, Schopenhauer believes, in terms of his own metaphysics. Christianity, as Schopenhauer perceives the spirit of the age, is slowly but tangibly vanishing both ideologically and spiritually from the hearts and minds of contemporary Europe. It is the death of one religion and the transition to a Europeanized version of the religions of India that constitute the opposing poles of Schopenhauer's philosophy of religion in Ryan's inquiry.

The great religions have sensed the truth that the world in reality is Will, if Schopenhauer is right. The faithful have nevertheless conceived of the relation between appearance and the world as it exists independently of thought only by means of metaphors contained in fantastical stories that gesture toward difficult metaphysical and moral truths. The hard work of understanding philosophical ideas is the province of only a few gifted minds, thinks Schopenhauer, and for the others who cannot hope to penetrate the mysteries of transcendental metaphysics there is a watered-down simplified philosophy that is subliminally enshrined in major world religions. As Christianity's star fades in Europe, so the European rediscovery of the religions of India reveals a more primordial grasp of the reality of the world beyond the ephemeral transitory appearance of things as pure willing or Will. The Hindu veil of *maya* equally conceals the Kantian thing-in-itself from experience with its fabric of illusion, permitting contact with and descriptive knowledge only of phenomena, the world as representation.

Ryan's book is divided into six chapters of exactly three parts each. Working through the substance of some of the chapters, one might wonder why such a rigid architectonic was chosen, and there are reprises of several topics within the structure of the text. The main chapters are: Introduction (I. The Death of God and the Oriental Renaissance, II. Schopenhauer's Philosophy of Religion, III. Hermeneutics vs Comparison); Chapter 1: Europe and India; Chapter 2: Metaphysical Need; Chapter 3: The Death of God; Chapter 4: True and Original Christianity; Chapter 5: The Original *Weltanschauung*; Chapter 6: The Oriental Renaissance. There are also acknowledgements, a key to textual citations from works by Schopenhauer and other scholarly apparatus, and the chapters are followed by a conclusion, bibliography, and combined name and subject index.

Religion as Schopenhauer conceives it may be a poor substitute for the metaphysics that human beings crave as part of their innate desire to understand the nature of existence, but it is nevertheless not merely a weak intellect's surrogate for transcendental metaphysics. Schopenhauer understands religious asceticism as an effort to overcome the suffering that inevitably occurs as a result of the

empirical will desiring things, and so suffering for their lack, and then suffering satiety and boredom whenever the individual will acting in real time happens to attain its desires. Ryan touches on but does not deeply develop this aspect of Schopenhauer's philosophy of religion, and one could have wished for a full chapter devoted to the subject. The same might be said of Schopenhauer's concept of compassion, which is crucial to his moral philosophy, and which features prominently especially in Buddhism, as another point connecting Schopenhauer with Indian religious values, but to which Ryan devotes no attention at all (indeed, the word 'compassion' does not even appear in Ryan's index).

What Ryan examines thoroughly instead are the questions in a series of interesting historical problems connected with the development of Schopenhauer's ideas about religion. There are important controversies surrounding the introduction of several different philosophically competent translations of the classic Indian religious texts, principally the *Upaniṣads* and *Vedas*, published in Germany beginning in the early nineteenth century, and affording a first modern European window revealing ancient Eastern religious teachings during Schopenhauer's philosophically formative years. Schopenhauer, surprisingly, given his linguistic talents and interest and enthusiasm for these writings, never learned to read Sanskrit, but relied instead on recently published Latin translations, a language in which he was highly proficient, in order to learn what the Indian sages taught, and to read between the lines of their verses in trying to recover their concept of the world and the place of human life in the world.

The interesting question that Ryan explores at length is the extent to which Schopenhauer developed an interest in classical Indian religions before or after he had staked out the main principles of his transcendental idealist metaphysics. There are numerous similarities, too many to be coincidental. Schopenhauer distinguishes between the world as will (*der Wille*), by which he interprets the Kantian thing-in-itself (*Ding an sich*), and as representation or idea (*Vorstellung*). He accepts a version of the Kantian distinction between how the world appears to us in thought, and as it must exist independently of all concepts and categories of the understanding, independently of human perception and all thinking, and existing outside of the way in which we cognitive subjects experience it and as it appears to consciousness. It is a commonplace in Schopenhauer studies that Schopenhauer's philosophy combines Plato, Kant, and the classical Indian religious thought of Hinduism (Brahmanism) and Buddhism. Schopenhauer, in the Appendix to the 1818 edition of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, declares: '[N]ext to the impression of the world of perception, I owe what is best in my own development to the impression made by Kant's works, the sacred writings of the Hindus, and Plato'. In his *Manuscript Remains 1*, Schopenhauer similarly explains: 'I do not believe my doctrine could have come before the *Upaniṣads*,

Plato and Kant could cast their rays simultaneously into the mind of one man' (see 160).

The question Ryan investigates is exactly how these pieces of the puzzle came together chronologically in Schopenhauer's philosophy as presented in his monumental treatise, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*. Did Schopenhauer fashion his transcendental idealism first from elements of Plato and Kant *and then* tack on a later discovery of Indian thought to the mix? Or was Indian religion an essential part of the synthesis he achieved more or less from the beginning? Could it even be, as Soviet-era historian Bernard Bykhovsky has less plausibly maintained, that Schopenhauer began with Indian thought, and only later sought collateral support in Plato and Kant for the ideas he absorbed from the *Vedas* and *Upaniṣads*? It would be hard to imagine Schopenhauer as merely following a contemporary trend of German intellectual interest in the scholarly publication of the Indian religious classics, and then finding a place in a pre-existent system for whatever ideas he may have found in the Indian holy texts that could somehow be made to fit. One has the definite sense in reading Schopenhauer that his interest in ancient Indian religions is sincere, even passionate, and that it is as much an integral part of his thinking as the metaphysics he takes from Plato and the transcendental aesthetic he adopts from Kant.

The question remains what concrete evidence and authoritative documentation there might be for one interpretation of Schopenhauer's contested relation to Indian religions as against its rivals. Ryan remarks:

A discussion of whether or not Schopenhauer was influenced by Indological works is pertinent to his philosophy of religion since, if indeed he was, then his distinction between philosophy as a self-sufficient, demonstrative science, and religion as a venerable tradition with external, authoritative supports, would be refuted in his own case. His assimilation of Hinduism and Buddhism as religio-allegorical and popular equivalents of his own philosophical metaphysics would therefore be fraudulent. For this reason, we begin this chapter with the much-debated question of influence. (159)

If it can be shown that Schopenhauer was exposed to Indian religious ideas from an early point in his career, and if those influences can be traced out in his early publications, such as the first (1813) edition of his dissertation, *Über die vierfache Wurzel des Satzes vom zureichenden Grunde*, and the first (1819) edition of *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, then a reasonably good case can be made for Schopenhauer's involvement with Indian religious thought from the very outset of his philosophical career, rather than as an addition merely to enhance an already virtually fully-formed metaphysics, epistemology and philosophy of science, ethics, and aesthetics.

The topic is an important one for Schopenhauer scholarship, because it goes to the heart of the problem as to whether Schopenhauer's avowed atheism amounts to a rejection of religion or merely a rejection of God. As Ryan remarks in several

places in the book, Schopenhauer was particularly impressed with the fact that (pure land, *hinayana*) Buddhism does not posit the existence of God or a pantheon of gods. Despite not recognizing a divinity or godlike person, Buddhism in its first of four pillars sounds the theme that Schopenhauer was to repeat in many different contexts as the foundation of his moral pessimism, that all life is suffering. The Vedic scriptures in turn furnished Schopenhauer with one of his most striking images, that of the distinction between phenomena and thing-in-itself construed as will divided by the veil of *maya*, of mere appearance, delusion and deception in the realm of the senses. For Ryan, the historical question is one of identifying as precisely as possible the exact point in time when Schopenhauer would have begun to read the Indian classics especially in Latin or later in German translation. What did he learn from these spiritual sources, and when did he make their acquaintance?

Ryan argues that Schopenhauer first became familiar with Abraham Hyacinth Anquetil-Duperron's two-volume (1801–1802) Latin translation of the *Upaniṣads* (*Oupnek'hat*) already in 1813, near the very beginning of his period of philosophical activity. Ryan writes: 'When, later in the same year [1813], Friedrich Majer directed [Schopenhauer] to the scriptures of classical India, Schopenhauer discovered therein the outlines of a system of religious metaphysics he considered compatible with ... the intellectual outlook of the age' (157). That there is historical justification for Schopenhauer's early introduction to ancient Indian religions does not necessarily imply, as Ryan suggests, that Schopenhauer's attitude toward the distinction between philosophy and religion, in contrast with his own practice is hypocritical and his philosophical metaphysics 'fraudulent'. It all rather depends on the nature of the influence early Indian religious literature may have exerted on Schopenhauer's philosophy.

Schopenhauer's thesis that philosophy is separate from religion does not mean that philosophy cannot profit from the insights metaphorically presented in religious dogma, stories and symbolisms, art and architecture, drama and other forms of literature. Indeed, since Schopenhauer regards philosophy as a relatively late cultural development, it would be surprising if he had adopted a narrow view of how philosophy might stand in debt for certain of its insights to religious instruction and practice. To acknowledge such a genetic connection between religion and philosophy, whereby philosophy is influenced by religious thought, is by no means to deprive philosophy of its independence as an exercise in abstract theoretization, in which the grounds for accepting concepts, distinctions, and conclusions are required to be given a rigorous justification, primarily involving the kinds of arguments that are seldom if ever found within religious writings. By analogy, one doubts that Schopenhauer would be embarrassed by the fact that art and art criticism in at least crude form must have existed prior to the development of philosophical aesthetics, or that folk wisdom concerning the discovery and verification of knowledge must have predated

epistemology as a systematic philosophical theory. Why should philosophy generally and philosophy of religion in particular be any different? To object on such grounds to Ryan's effort to identify the reason why it is historically and philosophically worthwhile to track down the chronology of Schopenhauer's involvement with Asian religions obviously takes nothing whatsoever away from Ryan's assertion that it is important in understanding Schopenhauer's philosophy to have a clear sense of when he was originally introduced to the *Upaniṣads*.

Thus, Ryan continues:

During the first period of his encounter – from his meeting with Majer up to the completion of the first edition of *The World as Will and Representation* in late 1818 – Schopenhauer's main sources included the first nine volumes of *Asiatick Researches* (the journal for the proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal), Mme de Polier's *Mythologie des Indous*, Julius Klaproth's journal *Das Asiatisches Magazin* (which contained Majer's German translation of Charles Wilkins' English *Bhagavad-Gita*) and Friedrich Schlegel's *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians*. (159)

By identifying the exact sources that Schopenhauer consulted and which might have encouraged him in working out the principles of his metaphysics, moral philosophy, and philosophy of religion, we can better appreciate that Schopenhauer was no mere dilettante where the latest European research in ancient Indian religions was concerned.

However, Ryan's discoveries by themselves do not answer the question which of Plato, Kant, and Asian thought, all in the melting pot from the beginning in Schopenhauer's thought, might have been more formative than the others. If such a question is impossible to answer without Schopenhauer's direct testimony, if even Schopenhauer might not have been able to say with any confidence how these distinct sources may have contributed to his mature conception of transcendental idealism, we can at least determine from Ryan's study that Schopenhauer did not arrive at Indian religion after hammering out the main principles of his philosophy, to which he then attached a recent trendy fascination with Hinduism and Buddhism as an afterthought. Ryan in this vein tentatively endorses the reasonable interpretation of Moira Nicholls, according to which, 'the influence [of Indian texts on Schopenhauer's philosophy] is gradual rather than immediate and develops over time as better and more sources became available to him' (165). The natural impression that Schopenhauer was first and foremost influenced by Kant and Plato (in that order) for whose ideas Indian religion, working through his writings going back to 1811, provided a partial overlay, is supported as well by Ryan's argument that: 'Schopenhauer's pre-1813 manuscript notes constitute further evidence that he interpreted Kant's idealism as a doctrine of illusion with metaphysical and ethical implications before reading the *Oupnek'hat*' (164).

The question of exactly how, to what extent and in what order Schopenhauer's three principal influences came to fruition in his thought may finally be unanswerable. The importance of such questions in understanding the historical background to Schopenhauer's philosophy is nevertheless undeniable, and Ryan in this valuable new book has appropriately raised and skilfully engaged the problem of relating these and other aspects of Schopenhauer's philosophy of religion.

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